

Dear Friends:

Tonight I'll join 85 outstanding teachers and about 300 other people at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center for an occasion that rivals the Oscars – the annual State Teacher of the Year banquet.

South Carolina has participated in the **National Teacher of the Year Program** for 43 years, and during that time, our program has grown tremendously. Corporate sponsorships have allowed the annual awards ceremony to become a major event.

About a month ago, the finalists came to Columbia for their interviews and to have lunch with some of the state's former teachers of the year. One of those teachers recalled the year that she won the honor. She came to Columbia, received a plaque and returned to her classroom the same day. That year she juggled her responsibilities as an elementary school teacher and the demands of speaking across the state.

Today, the State Teacher of the Year is a true ambassador. Beginning this summer, she will participate in a one-year residency program at the **Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement (CERRA)** and work with the South Carolina Teacher Forum, whose members are current district teachers of the year. The residency includes coordinating professional development for teachers and numerous speaking engagements around the state before civic and professional groups interested in education. The teacher will also participate in **Leadership South Carolina**, one of the oldest and most respected leadership programs in the country, and Notre Dame's Excellence in Teaching Symposium.

Any former teacher of the year will tell you that serving in this role is both an awesome responsibility and a challenging job. This year for example, Ann Marie Taylor from the Kershaw County has already logged more than 25,000 miles traveling our state.

The **2008-09 finalists** are Jenna Hallman, a science teacher at Calhoun Academy for the Arts in Anderson School District 5; Josie Stratton, an English teacher at Mayo High School for Math, Science and Technology in Darlington County; Renee Sanders, a biology teacher at Johnsonville High School in Florence School District 5; Laura Jean Reed, a music teacher at Stone Academy of Communications Arts in Greenville; and Rona Neely, a math teacher at Bell Street Middle School in Laurens School District 56.

Each of these teachers and all of our local honorees are outstanding teacher-leaders. They are dedicated educators who are doing remarkable things in their classrooms and in their communities. These women and men are passionate about what they do and deserve our gratitude and our support.

Sincerely,

Jim Rex
State Superintendent of Education

<http://www.ccsso.org/Projects/National%5FTeacher%5Fof%5Fthe%5FYear/>

<http://www.cerra.org/>

<http://www.clemson.edu/sandhill/page.htm?pageId=303>

<http://www.ed.sc.gov/news/more.cfm?articleID=925>